



Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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labour movement!

What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

Today one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production. Society is shaped by the capitalists' relentless drive to increase their wealth. Capitalism causes poverty, unemployment, the blighting of lives by overwork, imperialism, the destruction of the environment and much else.

Against the accumulated wealth and power of the capitalists, the working class has one weapon: solidarity.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty aims to build solidarity through struggle so that the working class can overthrow capitalism. We want socialist revolution: collective ownership of industry and services, workers' control and a democracy much fuller than the present system, with elected representatives recallable at any time and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

We fight for the labour movement to break with "social partnership" and assert working-class interests militantly against the bosses.

Our priority is to work in the workplaces and trade unions, supporting workers' struggles, producing workplace bulletins, helping organise rank-and-file groups.

We are also active among students and in many campaigns and alliances.

We stand for:

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. Free abortion on request. Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
- Working-class solidarity in international politics: equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.
- If you agree with us, please take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell — and join us!

Contact us:

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The Left Opposition that is not left

By Ann Field

The Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU) has teamed up with the Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine (PSPU) and a dozen smaller organisations to create the Left Opposition, "an alliance of left and centre-left parties and social organisations".

In fact, there is nothing remotely left-wing about this Left Opposition and its constituent elements. [No relation to the Left Opposition interviewed in *Solidarity* 368.]

The CPU is a conservative Russian-nationalist party. It has no links with the organised labour movement.

Its press runs overtly racist articles.

When it was still able to win seats in the Rada (Ukrainian parliament), it sold the top positions on the party list to the highest bidder. Hence, the richest woman in the last Rada session was a member of the CPU.

For the CPU, Stalin remains an authoritative source of political thinking:

A document submitted to the congress (held in Kiev last December) even cited Stalin as the source of its concept of the party: "Never, not for a minute, said Stalin, did the Bolsheviks ever conceive of the party as anything other than a monolithic organisation, hewn from a single block of stone."

Stalin-nostalgia goes hand in hand with USSR-nostalgia. According to an article published by the CPU two months ago:

"However determined anti-communists may be to besmirch the Soviet epoch,



Natalya Vitrenko

Yuri Gagarin is socialism, and socialism is Yuri Gagarin. His spaceship did not disappear in the atmosphere. It pierces time and space, illuminating the hopes of all who love their Soviet Motherland and are faithful to the cosmos of socialism."

In 2011 CPU MPs proposed legislation to criminalise being LGBT. In subsequent years they advocated reintroduction of the death penalty, and restrictions on freedom of conscience and religion to "safeguard" the position of the Russian Orthodox Church.

When Yanukovich — Ukrainian president at the time of the Maidan protests — presented a package of repressive laws to the Rada in early 2014, the CPU MPs voted for them unanimously. According to documents adopted by the last CPU congress, the US engineered a "neo-Nazi coup" in Ukraine. The "pro-western and essentially treacherous policies of the ruling Ukrainian regime" express

"the anti-human ideology of fascism."

These policies have resulted in "the loss of Crimea" (nothing to do with Russian military intervention!) and triggered "the resistance of the inhabitants of the Donbas, who reject the dictatorship of the Kiev pro-Nazi regime" (again, nothing to do with Russia!).

The CPU's main partner in the Left Opposition, the PSPU, is a cult around its leader, Natalya Vitrenko. Founded in 1996 with the goal of "restoring Soviet power" and "the unification of Ukraine, Russia and Belorussia", it is an anti-semitic, racist and clerical party.

ANTI-SEMITISM
Its website has carried recordings of former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke accusing Jews of organising mass immigration into Europe: "How Zionists Divide and Conquer." During the Maidan protests the PSPU blamed Jews for the social unrest.

Vitrenko has links with US political-cult-leader Lyndon LaRouche dating back two decades, and bases much of her economic rhetoric on his theories. She also has a long record of collaboration with the Russian fascist Alexander Dugin and his "Eurasian" movement.

Today, Vitrenko is leader of the Eurasian Popular Union of Ukraine (EPUU). The EPUU's slogan is: "Russia, Ukraine, Belorussia — Only Together Are We Holy Rus'."

According to the PSPU and EPUU (the politics of the two organisations are interchangeable), the Maidan was "a neo-Nazi putsch, aimed at establish-

ing a Nazi dictatorship" which has transformed Ukraine into a US colony:

Other organisations which have signed up to the Left Opposition are equally as far removed from left-wing politics. They include: Assembly of Russian-Orthodox Women of Ukraine, Union of Russian-Orthodox Fraternities, Slavic Committee of Ukraine, Kievan Rus', Union of Soviet Officers, Eurasian Popular Union of Ukraine, Anti-Fascist Committee, Gift of Life, and For the Unification of Ukraine, Belorussia and Russia.

Predictably, the main demand of the new Left Opposition is not class struggle, anti-capitalism or socialism. It is closer ties with Russia and Belorussia because:

"We are united with those countries — but not with the USA or EU countries — by a common history, culture, spirituality, and values of civilisation. History has shown that the territorial integrity and independence of Ukraine have been preserved only in conditions of the unity of our countries and fraternal peoples."

The CPU and the PSPU are both parties in decline. In the late 1990s the CPU had 121 seats in the Rada, but now it has none. In the late 1990s Vitrenko won over 10% of the votes when she stood for president, but in more recent presidential elections she has not even stood.

Even so, both still represent politically significant forces. The CPU claims a membership of 104,000. And some PSPU and ex-PSPU members played a significant role in last year's separatist movement in the Donbas (until increased Russian intervention pushed them aside).

The creation of the Left Opposition was reported in sections of the mainstream Ukrainian media. Many Ukrainians will conclude from this that left-wing and socialist politics are indeed a matter of Russian nationalism, Stalin, the Soviet Union, and alliances with fascist ideologies.

This underlines the need for socialists abroad to support those Ukrainian socialists attempting to build a genuine Left Opposition, and to challenge those who give expression to the politics of the CPU and the PSPU in their own countries.



A socialist win!

Workers' Liberty comrade Bob Carnegie (above right, celebrating) has been elected as branch secretary of the Queensland branch of the Maritime Union of Australia with 37% of the vote (against three other candidates). Bob campaigned on a platform of union democracy and returning the union to the rank and file. We congratulate Bob on his success and wish him and MUA members our all the best for the future.

Tories rob poorest families

By Ed Maltby

The government is threatening to cut child tax credits, a move which the Institute for Fiscal Studies says would take £1,400 per year from 3.7 million of the poorest families.

The Resolution Foundation point out that this is a piece of regressive taxation. It would mostly affect the poorest 30% of households and leave the richest 40% almost entirely untouched.

But the Conservatives are selling this move — surreally — as a means of raising wages.

In a speech on Monday 22 June Cameron green lighted the move, saying he promised to end “complacency in how we approach the issue of low pay”. Like a sanctimonious lifeguard lecturing a drowning man, Cameron complained that tax credits are only “dealing with the symptoms of the problem — topping up low pay rather than ex-

tending the drivers of opportunity.”

How anyone could imagine that taking £1,400 from millions of the worst-off would “extend the drivers of opportunity” is baffling. Or, as the *Financial Times* puts it, “David Cameron wants wage rises to replace benefits: researchers say there is no clear evidence that employers will make up lost tax credits”

Cameron certainly offered no explanation in his speech. He described the

tax credit system as “a merry-go-round”, which only deepened the mystery.

Solidarity is also in favour of “ending complacency in how we approach the issue of low pay”.

Unlike Cameron, whose plan to do that involves robbing the poorest parents and children, we believe the way to do that is to take from the richest instead: to tax the rich, expropriate the banks and introduce a much higher minimum wage.



For the right to strike!

By Gemma Short

Prior to Unison’s national delegates conference (16-19 June), Unison General Secretary Dave Prentis released a press statement about the Tories’ proposed anti-union laws. But neither his statement nor the conference itself resolved to do anything much about the biggest threat to union organisation in two decades.

The new laws would require a 50% turnout threshold in a ballot and an additional 40% yes vote requirement in “core public services” (health, education, transport and fire services), essentially outlawing all national strikes.

The laws will also make it a requirement for union members to “opt in” to a union’s political fund rather than “opt out”. The ability of the labour movement to fund its political party, to have a voice in politics, is crucial.

The businesses and wealthy individuals who fund the Tory party have no such restrictions!

Entitled “you will not crush us!”, the intention of Prentis’ statement was clearly to sound militant. But it highlights how little the major public sector union is doing to fight cuts or the new laws.

Prentis talks of a loss of members in the public sector due to job cuts, only to say that’s all okay because Unison has recruited well in the private sector. Nothing about fighting job losses or privatisations in the first place!

Prentis called the Government’s plans “vindictive” and said the union “could mount a legal challenge”. Prentis’ press release said “the new law would make no difference to the union’s strategy on industrial action”. But none of Unison’s national strike ballots in the last five years would meet the Tories’ requirements.

Prentis appears to echo

TUC General Secretary Francis O’Grady’s appeal to “box clever”, saying: “We must review everything we do. It would be tragic to have like First World War generals, leading people over the top only for them to be shot down. We must choose our battles carefully.”

The Campaign for Trade Union Freedom, a campaign sponsored by most unions, has its AGM on Saturday 27 June. The AGM is only for two hours and there is a small slot as item seven on the agenda to discuss the new attack. Hardly war footing.

STATUS QUO

Whilst we must fight the new attacks, it is not enough to simply defend the status quo.

We don’t have a “right to strike”; the UK has one of the most restrictive trade union laws in the western world. Postal ballots instead of workplace ballots, no right to strike in solidarity or over “political issues”, picketing laws and notice periods, all hold back unions and allow bosses ways to challenge a ballot in court.

We must campaign for positive demands — for the right to strike.

The official leadership of the labour movement looks set to timidly roll over in the face of these attacks. We must change that. If they won’t organise a national demonstration for the right to strike, union branches must take them to task — and organise the demonstration themselves.

Trade union activists in Workers’ Liberty are looking to work with others to pressure the union leaders into taking action, and to take action if they won’t.

• Get in touch: OurRightToStrike@gmail.com
• A model motion can be found at: bit.ly/ForARightToStrike



100-200,000 people marched against austerity in London on 20 June. On the same day 5,000 rallied in Glasgow (see bit.ly/1BK4T6x).

Opposition grows to “Murphyite” candidate

By Dale Street

When nominations closed for SLP leader and deputy leader last Friday, two candidates who most typify the politics which were rejected at the general election were standing

Ken Macintosh had been nominated for leader by seven MSPs (just enough to get onto the ballot paper) while Gordon Matheson had been nominated for deputy leader by two MSPs and 108 councillors.

When he stood for party leader in 2011, former leader Jim Murphy was one of his supporters. In 2011 Macintosh won the party members’ section of the electoral college, but lost in the trade union and elected

representatives section. This time he is likely to lose in all three sections: he has been widely criticised for triggering a leadership contest by deciding to stand.

Macintosh is standing against Kezia Dugdale, the SLP deputy leader under Murphy. Dugdale is not left-wing. On the other hand, she is not Ken Macintosh.

Three names have secured the number of nominations needed to stand for deputy leader: MSPs Richard Baker and Alex Rowley, and Glasgow City Council leader Gordon Matheson.

In last year’s leader and deputy leader contest Baker backed Murphy while Rowley backed Neil Findlay.

Matheson combines the

politics of Murphy (insofar as he has any politics at all) with the charisma of a second-hand doormat.

Since becoming council leader in 2010 Matheson’s only role in life has been to implement one cut in council spending after another, accompanied by a nasal whinge that Glasgow is getting more than its fair share of cuts imposed by SNP-controlled Holyrood.

“Defiance” is not a word to be found in his vocabulary. Matheson currently presides over the longest running strike in Britain — homelessness workers on strike for 13 weeks in a dispute about regrading.

Matheson has refused to intervene, on the grounds that decision-making powers lie with departmental man-

agers, not with him. He is after all, only the leader of the Council!

On a more positive note, opposition to Matheson, however late in the day, is beginning to take shape within Glasgow Labour Group.

“Whatever the question, the answer isn’t Gordon Matheson,” according to one Labour councillor, while another has claimed: “Even within the council a lot of those backing him are doing so hoping to see the back of him.”

But a more positive way of seeing the back of him would be to vote him out as Labour Group leader, not dump him on the SLP as deputy leader.

Students and workers unite and fight!

Shelly Asquith, newly elected NUS Vice-President for Welfare, spoke to *Solidarity*.

Solidarity: How do you account for the left victory in NUS?

Shelly Asquith: I think a part of it was a momentum of student activism from the demo in November 2014. After a lot of occupations and local demos kept up the momentum. Usually it's seen as something that the left do, but I think it was normalised this year. Maybe there was a change in the people who are organising within that movement. For example, there were more women this year. Also it was a general election year. People were feeling very anti-establishment and some of that was turned towards the NUS. Mostly we just worked harder, organised and campaigned really hard.

I think that the demographic of NUS conference was different as well. There were far more black students than ever before and more first-time delegates who were questioning the status quo.

S: There has been an issue of people getting elected and then coming under pressure and not being as bold as you would want? How do you think the left will work together on NUS Executive

SA: When you are taken away from campus you have less contact, traditionally, with campus activists and grassroots struggles. I think it is easy to get removed from what is going on and get influenced by the people you're around a lot. It's something we need to be aware of.

S: What's your take on the general election?

SA: The result was devastating. But it is good there's been massive demos and meetings in response. Labour lost because they were not offering enough of an alternative. They made some good pledges around freezing energy prices and increasing the minimum wage but they didn't go far enough. The lines on immigration and austerity, two very big issues, were just a cop-out – very similar to what the Tories were offering. I don't think that the unions and others in the party were putting enough pressure on Miliband to be bold enough. I am convinced that a left-wing Labour government could get a majority but it would take others on the left to get behind that and at the moment I don't blame anyone for not.

S: What do you think are the big issues we need to be organising around now?

SA: Immigration is going to have a huge impact on international students. The Tories are talking about reducing migration from

hundreds of thousands to just tens of thousands and that means international students will face a massive reduction. Denying EU migrants any kind of benefits will have a big impact, potentially causing people to become homeless.

The other thing is the welfare state, particularly the Disabled Students' Allowance and Access to Work benefits. The attacks on the NHS are something the students' movement needs to wake up to. Also trade union freedoms and the crack-down on the right to strike. If the education unions can't fight back then that weakens students as well. It's good to see people organising around the Human Rights Act already.

S: What do you want to achieve this year and what is your measure of success?

SA: I went into the election talking about fighting for the welfare state, rent controls, things that I thought we could win and now I am not as confident. We should build movements around these things though. I want to change the way the welfare campaign works for students and campuses. I'll be looking at where people are already doing stuff and link them up, with the rent strike at UCL for instance. One of the first things I'm going to do is write a guide on how to implement Cops Off Campus, because that's been something that the NUS has side-lined. It's going to be more about going out to campuses and helping people do their own stuff. But also doing a lot of work about how we resist the cuts that are coming to the NHS and benefits and being active around anti-racism and anti-fascism. Given the fact that UKIP came second in one hundred and twenty constituencies means these issues should be a priority. On housing I think that a lot of NUS's output has been about creating tool kits and guides. Meanwhile in Scotland we've had a massive campaign around the living rent campaign which is engaging tons of activists and making waves in the Scottish Parliament. It should be something that's going on across the UK.

The argument around rent controls has been won. It's just about making it happen now.

I also want to link up with faith groups and liberation campaigns.

It's really important for students to link up with workers. It's something we did quite a bit at my union and ran some very successful campaigns. If the limits on the right to strike go through, it's going to be really important for students to link up with trade union branches on campus and give them courage to fight.

NUS's links with unions should be less about going to meetings with the general secretary and signing a statement and more about seeing where things are happening, for example the 10% of jobs at risk at London Met, and going down to the picket and working out what you can do. Can the NUS send money? Can it send people down to the picket? It is about convincing students why this is important. In turn staff that were in a struggle we support will want to support student action.

SI: We have criticisms of the culture of the student movement and the left, about a culture of a lack of debate and an at-



tempt to, in various forms, to “no platform” and shut down people that you don't like. There's a very dramatic version of it with the SWP, but more generally there is not much of a culture of debate on the student left and in the student movement. Do you think that is true or unfair?

SA: In NUS I think there are not enough forums for debate; the Executive meets five times a year, but that is a few people in a room and it is not translated into the wider movement. And then there's the annual conference, but that's about it. This year we need to get the student group together as a whole to debate and sort out strategies. I think the left in general is way too inward-looking but that's changing. If people are wrong we do need to be critical of them. I guess we need to create the spaces where those debates can happen. I have been quite encouraged with the Radical Assembly.

S: What do you think is the role of the NCAFC?

SA: I think its role is to keep building ac-

tivist groups on campuses, making sure that that they come together two or three times a year and are taking part in the national debate. Holding me and others to account, making sure we're still in touch with those groups and are doing what we set out to achieve. And also being the group that does things when NUS fails to do it, like the demo in November.

S: Do you think that there is the possibility of more unity on the student left?

SA: Yes, I think it's really necessary. Some of the action that's happened since the general election result has shown a real willingness to work together more. There are still elements of people calling actions just to spite another group and that kind of thing. But people just need to wake up and work together more. People will always have legitimate criticisms of others and they need to be vocalised.

More debate, but the same time working with people where you can and where there are shared aims.



Rent strike wins compensation

David Dahlborn, the Halls Accommodation Officer at UCL Students' Union who has been influential in organising the rent strike in two university halls of residence, spoke to *Solidarity*.

Solidarity: How did the idea of a rent strike first come about at UCL?

DD: It's been an idea that has sort of existed for a while. Throughout the year there has been a campaign by students to lower the rent at UCL halls, which are some of the most expensive in the country and which have been going up (above-inflation year on year). We talked about the idea of rent strikes for a long and time and when problems started springing up at Hawkridge and Campbell Houses, we decided it wouldn't be hard to convince residents of what action to take.

S: When and how did the 2 rent strikes start?

DD: The rent strikes started on 8 May (simultaneously) at Hawkridge and Campbell Houses. This was the deadline for outstanding rent to be paid. By then we had convinced enough students to withhold their rent in protest and demand compensation for the unacceptable living conditions they'd had to endure. Those included major building works that made it impossible to live, let alone study, in the rooms.

S: What concessions have you won?

DD: We have won several concessions so far. We stopped the university from carrying out construction during May [during exam period] for a whole month. We won £132 of compensation for hundreds of students. We made sure that there was alternative accommodation available to students suffering from poor living conditions. We made sure that conditions for students were made slightly less shit than they were originally!

S: What's the current state of the rent strikes?

DD: Currently the campaign is teetering on a knife-edge, I'd say. We're doing everything we can to keep it going. We're appealing to everyone who wants to see serious militant action taken against the London housing crisis to help us succeed. Primarily through submitting three very clear de-



mands to UCL: to drop all victimisation of the striking students, to drop all disciplinary actions, and to meet the full demands of compensation (a retroactive rent reduction) without any more mucking about. We think we can succeed but we need help in doing this and that is what will decide the fate of this campaign.

S: What have you learnt from the experience, is there anything you might do differently next time around?

DD: There's a lot we've learnt! I've learnt that a lot of hours need to be put into something like this. It takes a lot of work. You need to make sure that everybody at all times knows what's going on so that we can respond to the university (quickly). You need to know who you're dealing with (which we've learnt as we've gone along).

I've learnt that a strike fund is needed in order to make people feel secure! Money was raised in the end in order to pay people's late rent fees. This was important in making students feel confident enough to continue with the strike action.

In a way it's been an important experience to learn from. We may have planned for things earlier here and there but overall it's been important to gain experience from this action in order to go into the future with the confidence of knowing you've fought before and won things.

S: Any final points?

DD: Solidarity is important. When some students are victimised it's important that everyone stands with them.

This is why we are having a demonstration at UCL's open day on Friday 3 July in order to demand that UCL treats its students with respect and accepts the demands of the students.

Student grant cuts planned

By Monty Shield

Since its foundation in 1990, the Student Loans Company has been growing.

It is the body which handles maintenance loans — loans which could be about to increase.

It has recently been reported that the government plans to reduce student maintenance grants before eventually removing them altogether. They plan to push students who currently receive grants into taking higher loans by increasing the amount of the maintenance loan available to poorer students.

Working-class students who struggle to cover the "every day costs" of study will be the most affected by this. They will become

part of a simple but effective plan: cut the grants and force the affected students into greater debt via a larger maintenance loan.

This is another assault on working-class students and the right to free education for all. It is consistent with a long history of government attacks on poorer students, aided by the creation of the Student Loans Company, and demonstrates the urgent need for a strong free education movement.

The plan also fits into the government's policy of austerity, which is an ideological attack on the working class across all sections of society, as well as students.

Recognising the connection between student debt, austerity and class oppression, and challenging this on a socialist basis, is imperative.

Free Raif Badawi!

By Pete Radcliff

On 7 June the Supreme Court of Saudi Arabia upheld the increase in the sentence on Saudi blogger, Raif Badawi.

Raif was charged with "setting up a website that undermines general security", "ridiculing Islamic religious figures", and "going beyond the realm of obedience" in December 2012 — a victim of reaction against the Arab Spring across the region. In July 2013 he was sentenced and in May 2014 his sentence was increased to 10 years' imprisonment and a thousand lashes to be delivered over 20 weekly sessions of 50 lashes each.

An international campaign rapidly grew demanding that the floggings be stopped and for him to be immediately and unconditionally released. Amnesty International's petition attracted over 1.2 million signatures; weekly vigils took place across the world. In London English PEN organized weekly vigils outside the Saudi Embassy.

Saudi Arabia has dramatically changed its foreign policy over the last year and its internal treatment of dissidents has to be seen in this context.

For a long time Saudi Arabia took its lead from the West on Middle East foreign policy. Its ruling class accumulated vast wealth after the hike in oil prices in 1972. Its oil was bought and distributed by European and American companies; its assets were handled by Western banks and its increasingly large military expenditure was spent on contracts with Western arms companies.

Over the last 40 years the extent of Saudi-European and Saudi-American capitalist interpenetration has become immense. The UK has nearly £12 billion invested in Saudi Arabia and continues to invite Saudi investment in the UK, particularly in the property market. Saudi investment in the UK is currently over £62.5 billion. As capitalist interdependence grew so did foreign policy interdependence. Despite the Wahhabist Islamist doctrine on which the regime was built and internally maintained, Saudi Arabia became Western imperialism's key ally in the region.

But Saudi Arabia is no simple agent of US imperialism as some socialists have argued. It had its own desires to extend its political and financial dominance.

The Saudi Arabian religious and royal hierarchy — its ruling class — have spent immense amounts (reported by some to be as high as £10 billion a year) in funding mosques, madrassas (religious schools) as well as other social and charitable endeavours across the "Muslim world", to build the status of, and make allies for, Saudi Arabia in these countries. The international network around the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood benefited enormously, as did many others.

This began to fragment with the US/UK war on Iraq in 1991. Saudi Arabia allowing US and UK bases on their territory was too much for their, more-consistently Wahhabist, allies in other countries. However Saudi Arabia did not yet feel threatened by the divergence amongst its international allies.

The emergence of Daesh (ISIS) has triggered the more major change in Saudi internal and foreign policies in the past year.



Members of the Free Raif UK campaign

The rulers of Saudi Arabia have woken up the fact that the billions of dollars they are investing in the indoctrination of Muslim youth across the world is not primarily enhancing their power, but that of Daesh.

They have now taken the decision to forcefully re-assert themselves as the centre of Wahhabist clerical fascism.

In Saudi Arabia there is now a huge working class in vast expanding cities. There are a million building workers alone. There are eight million migrant workers. There is a fascist regime: no democratic or labour rights; no free speech or free press. But the current repression in Saudi is not only the remnant of a medieval ideology — it is a sign of its weakness and fear.

Raif Badawi had the courage to speak out after the Arab Spring of 2011-12. He remains under threat of the floggings restarting at any time and he is known not to be in a good physical condition.

That is why the campaign to defend him and to expose the hypocrisy and complicity of Western governments if they do not get him out of jail is so important.

The UK campaign to get Raif, his lawyer Waleed Abu AlKhair, and other "prisoners of conscience", released was set up three months ago. We handed in an open letter to the Prime Minister on 17 June demanding a ban on arms sales to Saudi Arabia and calling for other trade sanctions on things that give succour to the regime. The letter was signed by 930 human rights activists, including Noam Chomsky, Bianca Jagger and Jimmy Wales as well as many writers, journalists and bloggers.

David Cameron won't stop the arms trade with Saudi Arabia — we know that. There are currently legal challenges to try and block contracts being made with Saudi prisons by UK businesses. But legal challenges and pleas to any politician will not be enough.

We need to campaign politically and do so energetically. We need to take the issue to the trade union movement — to the workers whose products are being passed to the Saudi state terrorists.

Getting Raif out of prison is an essential step in the liberation of all victims of tyranny in Saudi Arabia and ending the tyranny that Saudi Arabia spreads across the Middle East and beyond.

• The UK coalition to Free Raif is calling for a mass protest outside the Saudi Embassy should he be flogged again. The protest will take place the day after any flogging. PEN are asking people to pledge to take part at bit.ly/FreeRaifPledge

Labour, the left, and the general election

Letters



It is good that Harry Glass, in his article “The left and the general election” (*Solidarity* 366) opened the discussion about the left’s role in the general election. However, I think the focus of his fire on some occasions is wrong.

He argues that “the dismal vote attained by candidates to the left of Labour suggests their approach is flawed.” But then goes on to outline a few places where the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition’s (TUSC) “dismal” votes were sufficient to stop Labour winning the seat. Logically, had TUSC received less dismal votes then in Harry’s view their approach wouldn’t have been flawed — but it would have further electorally harmed Labour.

Trotsky, when discussing the ILP standing candidates against Labour, wrote: “It would have been foolish for the ILP to have sacrificed its political programme in the interests of so-called unity, to allow the LP to monopolise the platform as the Communist Party did. We do not know our strength until we test it. There is always a risk of splitting, and of losing deposits, but such risks must be taken: otherwise we boycott ourselves.”

Workers’ Liberty used this quote to support standing candidates against Labour in a pamphlet we published in April 2004 (after the launch of Respect and when the Socialist Alliance was in the process of ceasing to exist!) It is clear that TUSC is in no way analogous to the ILP in 1930s. However, our condemnation of them must be that their programme was wholly inadequate, not that they took votes from Labour. They didn’t call for a workers’ government. They appeared as left reformists and didn’t even put all the Socialist Party’s (the main force behind TUSC) programme, as unsatisfactory as that would still be. In an election poisoned by xenophobia and nationalism they did nothing to raise the issue of migrant rights.

Surely, the biggest responsibility for the election result rests on the cowardly Labour leadership who ran such a

vapid campaign, a campaign which persuaded less than 20% of the electorate to vote for it. The leaders of the unions, most of whom on paper have better policies than the Labour manifesto, did not use their remaining weight within the party to push for the policies of their unions, also shoulder a huge amount of responsibility.

However, the left does bear a big responsibility for the awful results in the election. The failure to build a sufficiently large organisation implanted in the working class which could stand independent working class candidates against Labour has allowed petty-bourgeois alternatives, nationalists and right-wing populists to pick up the widespread disgust in our class at the Westminster political machine. Worse than the return of the Tories is that the agenda for the political alternative to them, currently, is set by forces to their right, the left could have and should have done something about that. Building such an organisation does not mean that we would or should eschew work in the Labour Party, or work in the affiliated unions to affect events within the Labour Party. That argument still needs to be won with the left at large.

Whilst in the 2015 election we were faced with no alternative but to call for a Labour vote in most if not all constituencies, we must consider whether the focus on a Labour victory was the most effective way of raising our politics and building the forces of revolutionary socialism. When you consider less than 20% of the electorate voted for a Labour victory and that large numbers of our class and radical young people, who are probably more open to our ideas, chose to vote for various petty-bourgeois options, might not we have persuaded more people had we focussed on our propaganda for a workers’ government, whilst patiently explaining that necessary forces for this remain, largely impotently, wedded to the Labour Party and this required voting Labour and working within it?

It may be that Corbyn’s candidacy for Labour leader might mark a sea-change within the Labour Party. We must do everything we can to ensure that it does. Nonetheless, we must recognise that Corbyn is only on the ballot paper via largesse of right wing MPs such as Frank Field, Sadiq Khan



Labour affiliated unions do not use their weight to fight

and David Lammy.

More importantly the leadership election and the election for Labour’s candidate for London Mayor is the beginning of the implementation of the Collins report — not due to be implemented until 2016 — as both are being carried out without an electoral college. This seems to have happened entirely without comment from the left or the unions, let alone any opposition!

The structural reforms of the Collins report make it more difficult for unions to express a collective working-class voice in the party. They build on and extend the Blairite reforms to the Party which effectively concrete over the channels for democratic control of the Party and left any life in the Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) similar to isolated rock pools, unable to link up with life in other CLPs.

The trajectory remains for the Labour Party to cease to be a bourgeois-workers party. This isn’t unchallengeable but we must recognise it. We must also consider seriously the most effective tactics to challenge this.

I would suggest that unless we are able to use the Corbyn campaign to affect a sea-change, we will need to revisit the issue of standing candidates against Labour and focus our propaganda around our concept of a workers’ government.

Duncan Morrison, Deptford

Rebuild socialist infrastructure!

It was interesting to read the latest in the exchange between Daniel Randall and John Cunningham (*Solidarity* 367).

Over the last few years it has often seemed to me that exhortations to rethink our fundamental ideas have come from many quarters and not resulted in much. They are in a similar vein to the person who sits in the campaign planning meeting saying “we need to be more creative,” but when you drill down into what they actually mean it doesn’t go much further than “have a Twitter” or “sit in a shop for a bit.”

There is a real historical crisis of political social democracy which is occurring due to the reconfiguration of the labour market, the death of manufacturing jobs and all the rest of it. The irony is that the trade unions will probably, in the long run, ride this out much more successfully than the Labour Party will. Of course our call centres and warehouses are not post-industrial in any sense, as workplaces.

My workplace, a university, is larger than most factories were even in Britain’s industrial heyday, with a workforce similarly divided by job roles and different craft, professional, and union attitudes. Workplaces should in and of themselves be no harder to organise than they ever were.

I think there is a real issue, though, in a lack of the sort of cultural and social infrastructure that helps sustain the labour movement. While workplaces haven’t fundamentally changed since the high industrial era, working class communities have. We don’t live within a stone’s throw of our place of work. We don’t go drinking with our colleagues (well, I don’t), and our kids won’t marry our colleagues’ kids. There will be (and are) many call centre workers in unions, but there’s unlikely to be a Durham Call Centre Workers’ Gala.

Industrial workplaces still exist, but tight-knit industrial communities don’t. I think it’s the conflation of these that has led many people in recent years to the conclusion that the



Durham Miners Gala is held annually in July

workplace should no longer be the premier site of struggle against capital. A serious effort to rebuild the socialist infrastructure which we have lost is long overdue. Imagine if, for example, TUSC had opened workers’ advice centres or education centres in two or three towns instead of frittering thousands of pounds away on lost deposits.

Wouldn’t something like that be more valuable in the long run, to augment, sustain, and give a political edge to our ongoing industrial work?

Edd Mustill, Liverpool

Screaming Violets

Screaming Violets is a new left feminist magazine. It looks good. It has in-depth reports, analysis, interviews and poetry! Hopefully it can expand and grow and be a broad vehicle for anti-capitalist and socialist feminists to promote and discuss ideas.

Where is the magazine coming from? The mission statement by the magazine says the publication is “informed, inspired and influenced by the many insights and truths of intersectional feminism” — feminism which has “raised our collective understanding of how different forms of oppression... intersect with each other.”

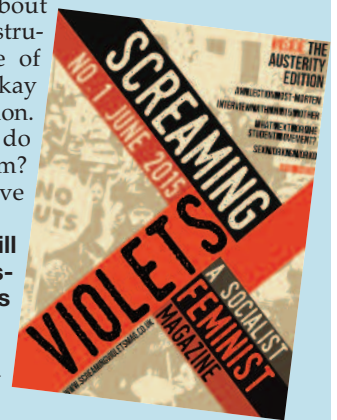
The authors say this is significant because “traditional Marxism...” “has either ignored or not paid enough attention to the impact of these systems of oppression within the working class”. I agree... up to point. I think the statement needs elaboration in several ways. Certainly groups like the SWP and the Socialist Party, affected by the Stalinist degradation of Trotskyism, often (not always) have used feminism and ideas about women’s liberation in an instrumental way i.e. the cause of women’s liberation is okay when it suits their organisation.

On the other hand what do we want from our Marxism? Many socialist feminists have had lots to say about that.

I hope the magazine will be a space to discuss issues of theory as well as activism!

Cathy Nugent

• www.screamingvioletsmag.co.uk



Corbyn: agitate, educate, debate, organise!

Many people who were not previously interested in the Labour Party want to support Jeremy Corbyn's campaign for Labour leader. That's good.

How can we build something solid out of this? Since the labour movement is generally at a political low, Corbyn won't win. A good vote for him will put pressure on the Labour leadership to oppose cuts and defend union rights. But that will be a slight and temporary affair unless we use the campaign to renew an organised left in the labour movement which keeps up the pressure.

Every socialist can campaign in her or his workplace (and in her or his local community, among her or his friends, etc.) to sign people up to vote in the leadership election. They can do that by registering as "supporters" (free if you're a member of an affiliated union, £3 otherwise) or by signing up as a full Labour Party member (cheap rates if you're young, or in an affiliated union, or working part-time). See support.labour.org.uk and join.labour.org.uk.

The number of members that affiliated unions now sign up as "supporters" may be very important for their future weight in the Labour Party. We should demand the leaders of affiliated unions run energetic sign-up campaigns and back Corbyn. The Bakers' Union and ASLEF already back Corbyn.

In non-affiliated unions, too, like PCS, RMT, or NUT, we should argue for the union leaders to back Corbyn and publicise to their members details of how to register to vote. In every union, we can join or set up networks of the "Railworkers for Corbyn" or "Teachers for Corbyn" type.

In every locality, we can join or set up a local vote-Corbyn network, and have it offer speakers and information to local union branches and community groups. "Students for Corbyn"? "Artists for Corbyn"? "Disabled People for Corbyn"? The possibilities are many.

But each individual's vote is just a mark on a ballot-paper. (The ballot will run from 14 August to 10 September). It has weight only if followed up with organisation.

So we should argue against those who say they'll vote for Corbyn, but give up on the Labour Party if he doesn't win. The lasting gain from the leadership contest will be the connections established to build a better left in the labour movement.

And that left will need politics very different on many issues from Corbyn's, which in international politics are mostly close to the *Morning Star* (albeit better on Tibet). Part of the lasting gain, then, is the discussions and debates, in workplaces and elsewhere, about politics.



Corbyn speaking at the End Austerity Now demonstration on 20 June

It is impossible, and rightly so, to build a solid left in the labour movement on the basis of "our enemy's enemy is our friend". The basis must be support for the democratic rights of all peoples and opposition to predators both big and smaller.

The battle over the Labour Party will not end, one way or the other, with the Corbyn campaign. Because of the Labour Party's mass support and its links to bedrock workers' movement through trade union affiliation, activity in it, or connected to it, makes sense for socialists and labour movement militants.

More generally, to achieve radical social change, and certainly to get rid of capitalism, we need to transform and renew the labour movement.

Against the power of the capitalist class, we should aim for the strongest and most responsive organisation of the exploited. At the core is a fight to transform our trade unions, on every level — including their representation and intervention in politics. The battle in the Labour Party is part of that, and the leadership campaign can help us step up the fight.

Our aim in the campaign is to have the socialist left emerge from it bigger, more confident, more embedded in the labour movement, and clearer about what do next.

- www.jeremyforlabour.com
- If you would like to discuss our activity in the campaign email awl@workersliberty.org

For a consistent left!

Corbyn is a staunch ally of the Stop the War Coalition which has, at least implicitly, backed Bashar al-Assad's dictatorship in Syria, was in the past eager to work with the reactionary Islamist Muslim Association of Britain (allied to the Muslim Brotherhood) and refused to allow socialist critics (including those of a Middle Eastern background) to get a hearing within the campaign.

Corbyn has supported groups like Hamas and Hezbollah (inviting representatives of both to speak in the House of Commons). He backs them as an automatic extension of his support for the Palestinian cause. But it is not necessary to give political support to these two reactionary Islamist forces, both of which want to see the destruction of Israel, in order to back the Palestinian cause!

Corbyn has also been a supporter of the populist, and authoritarian, government in Venezuela.

We have long criticised the politics Corbyn shares with many on the left, one which tends to take up causes on the basis of "the-enemy-of-my-enemy-is-my-friend": Hamas and Hezbollah are bombed by the Israeli government, therefore I do more than oppose that bombing (as we would), I must back Hamas and Hezbollah.

As revolutionary socialists, we do not have illusions in regimes that make anti-imperialist rhetoric — as Hugo Chavez did in Venezuela. We look instead to the working-class organisations to make democratic, anti-imperialist and

socialist revolutions.

Unfortunately Corbyn's views are representative of what has come to be the consensus on the left, a consensus which has scarcely waned, even as the people who most promoted those views, the Socialist Workers' Party and George Galloway have waned in influence. Undoubtedly Corbyn's views will limit his support among working-class people who do not wish to attach themselves to reactionary forces in international politics. We understand their concerns.

Standing aside from the campaign around Corbyn, centred on issues like cuts and union rights, will hinder not help the fight for a better politics for the left.

People will come to the campaign who are not signed up to his international politics, but want to fight the Tories, and the cuts. We will explain why Hamas is not a friend of democracy and socialism and argue for third camp, working-class socialist ideas with those people.

Also Jeremy Corbyn is not George Galloway. He is not a



Corbyn with Hugo Chavez

cynical professional "lefty" politician who bases his career on self promotion who routinely shuts down debate wherever he holds sway.

We criticise Corbyn's politics as part of a general effort to change the politics of the left and build a better left. A left which is consistently for working-class politics all over the world.

A slower strangulation?

By Dora Polenta

The main article in *Avgi*, Syriza's newspaper, of 23 June states that for the first time in five months of negotiations the news from Brussels is promising.

Avgi concedes that an agreement will be "difficult" and that the Greek side "had to cover most of the distance". However, in an ongoing effort to reduce working class expectations, *Avgi* claims that the agreement is still beneficial for the working-class majority and is still better than an agreement that would have been reached if New Democracy and Pasok were in government.

Avgi claims that the tentative agreement avoids the reduction of pensions to 360 euros, as was envisaged in the previous Memorandum, and the elimination of auxiliary pensions and the Pensioners' Social Solidarity Benefit (EKAS). It says that the government is also negotiating a return to collective bargaining agreements, which will allow better wages and work conditions.

The article claims that the Syriza government has achieved a general shape of fiscal policy that could shift the burden of "savings" from lower to the middle and higher incomes.

It recognises that the government's proposals are a retreat from the election commitments of Syriza. It describes aspects of the agreement as ideologically unpleasant and says that the government will make systematic efforts to reduce their effects.

In reality, the Greek government's new "offer" includes:

A. Payments by the workers, pensioners and popular strata. These include permanent anti-labour measures, specifically:

(a) Increase private sector workers' social security contributions by 1%. This is an indirect reduction of the private sector wages. Increase both private and public sector workers' contributions to auxiliary pensions.

(b) Maintenance of the Memorandum "solidarity levy" on wages. For incomes lower than 30,000 euros the "solidarity levy" contribution is maintained at the Memorandum level; for higher incomes it is increased.

(c) Introduction of a pensioners' 5% contribution to auxiliary/supplementary pensions for healthcare.

(d) An increase of pensioners' healthcare contributions from 4% to 5%.

(e) Gradual abolition of "early retirement" over three years, starting 1 January 2016.

(f) Increases in indirect taxation, especially VAT, which hits poorer people much harder than the well-off. 30% of food will be transferred to the high VAT rate of 23% (from 13% today). The government also proposes to abolish the reduced



VAT rates applied on the Aegean islands.

B. Payments by business and corporations: these measure are mostly temporary rather than permanent.

(a) Increase of the employers' / bosses social security contribution, plus a one-off ad hoc contribution from companies with net profits in 2014 of more than 500,000 euros.

(b) For 14,930 companies with profits above 100,000 euros, the income tax rate will be increased from 26% to 29%.

(c) Increase from 10% to 13% in taxation for private owners of cars of over 2,500 cubic centimetres and for ship owners, aircraft and swimming pools.

(d) Taxes on television advertising with target revenues of 200 million euros.

(e) One-off auctions of mobile telephony licences and of licences for online gambling

(f) Reductions in military spending.

WAGES AND PENSIONS

For the 2015-2016 period, the burden of the €8 billion fiscal measures is predominantly carried by the working class majority. €4.5 billion worth, 57% of the total, comes from direct and indirect reductions in wages and pensions and additional taxation, and €2.8 billion worth from business and corporations.

And things can only get worse. The "partners/institutions" have yet to seal the agreement. And as the next D-Day approaches and the pressures increase the government to reach a deal at all cost, the proposals are likely to be modified

further for the benefit of the creditors. The government's achievement in exempting electricity bills from the 23% bracket of VAT is a drop in the ocean.

According to the office of national statistics the number of people in poverty in Greece now exceeds six million. According to the same study, the total additional taxation burden of the working class majority has reached 300%. The increase has been 125% for the middle

class and only 12% for the ruling class.

The only consolation that the government is hoping for is a vague promise for a restructuring of the debt (sometime in the distant future), which is not going to be far from the November 2012 debt restructuring proposal and is a far cry from Syriza's program of a pan-European debt summit which would abolish the majority of the debt with debt repayments.

The "grey smoke" that has come out of the euro-talks is actually jet black for the working class majority, pensioners and youth. The working class has to take the steering wheel and become the compass of Syriza and the revolutionary left in and outside Syriza.

For those who do not want in the idea of "the government of the Left" to become a "parenthesis" there is only one answer: fight to block this destructive agreement. We do not accept this government's capitulation to old and new memoranda!

The Syriza MPs, the Central Committee, and the Political Bureau alongside Syriza's rank and file should take a clear position, resist the flagrant breach of the government's popular mandate and demand the holding of an emergency conference of Syriza to adopting a program of rupture with the EU/ECB/IMF Troika and the Greek capitalist oligarchy.

Inside Syriza, besides the Left Platform, which has been targeted by the mainstream media, there are other components of the revolutionary left and diffuse left-radical forces and voices. The coordination of these forces is now indispensable in order to avoid a political tragedy and to keep alive the hope created by the establishment of Syriza as a unifying and radical operation on the left.

A government of the Left which defies the blackmail exerted by the EU leaders and the IMF on behalf of the bankers must be prepared for expulsion from the euro and transition to a local currency. But a local currency within the context of capitalism is not going to solve any of the major problems. On the contrary, it is going to exacerbate them.

Socialist measures are needed for the functioning of the economy and for working-class survival: nationalisation of the banking system, nationalisation of strategic sectors of the economy, an economic reconstruction plan, cancelling the debt, democracy in the production process with social and workers' control.

On the basis of such a socialist perspective and program there is hope, both for the Greek working class and for the pan-European working class who will support and embrace the initiative and the prospects offered by the Greek labour and popular movement. Capitalism, facing the most profound international crisis since the 30s, offers only despair.

Timeline

25 January: Syriza wins Greek election and forms coalition government with Anel.

21 February: Initial agreement between eurozone finance ministers and Greece on extension of "bailout" agreement. But no cash released until Greece submits new cuts plan.

22 June: Emergency summit of EU prime ministers and finance ministers. Greek government submits yet another plan, which EU leaders call "a good starting point".
24 June: Eurozone finance ministers' meeting.

25 June: Scheduled EU summit.

29 or 30 June: Last dates the German parliament can be recalled to approve a further extension of "bailout". On paper, this extension could bring the Greek government credits totalling €16bn.

30 June: End date of current extended "bailout", and deadline for €1.5bn Greek loan repayments to the International Monetary Fund.

20 July: Two bonds totalling €3.5bn fall due to the ECB. Another €3.2bn is due for two more bonds held by the ECB on August 20.



From “staying in Europe” to “staying in Memorandum”

Kolonaki, Filothei, Kifissia, Kefalari, Varkisa, Voula, all the rich suburbs of Athens, took to the streets on 22 and 17 June in the first protests in Syntagma Square against the Syriza government. According to the placards of the kitsch ultra-neo-liberals, these were demonstration “Against the Soviet past and further Sovietisation of Greece”.

They had all the accessories: coloured whistles and standardised placards in Greek and English. And, for the first time in the Greek crisis, dozens of protesters got into parliament undisturbed by the police.

There was no sign of riot police. Syriza representatives commenting on TV aware politically critical of the “protesters”, but defended and acknowledged the right to protest.

The demonstrators cried “We are remaining in the euro”; whilst at the same time they were rushing to the ATMs and banks so as to stash their savings outside Greece.

New Democracy [ND, Greek equivalent of the Tory party], was the main mover, but To Potami and Pasok, with the full support of Greece’s bourgeoisie, were striving to rally mainly upper middle class people, but also some sections of workers

and youth, to put pressure on the Syriza-ANEL government to sign a new Memorandum.

“Imagine Greece out of Europe? We will become like Hoxha’s Albania” commented two fearful bourgeois ladies. “Please Jesus, help us stay in Europe”, said the placard of a “gentleman”. They see “Tsipras and his government” as a “red threat” or “the red junta”. For them, the Greek civil war of the 1940s is not over.

Working-class mobilisations and rallies have been called by Syriza, Meta, and Antarsya, as well as the trade unions of the private and public sectors, against the blackmail of the creditors.

The working-class movement should demand loudly and firmly that the government should end the “negotiations”, should abolish all Memorandum laws, and should implement the commitments of Syriza’s Thessaloniki declaration.

Protests against austerity, and in solidarity with the struggle of the Greek people were also held over the weekend 20-21 June in Brussels, Amsterdam, Vienna, London, Rome, Paris, etc.

The task of the hour

Syriza left-winger Stathis Kouvelakis published this statement on his Facebook page late on 23 June: **Such a package of measures, comparable at all points to the potion administered continuously in the country for five years, can only cause further recession, unemployment and poverty.**

And this in a country that has lost a quarter of its domestic product in five years, with unemployment affecting more than one person in four and one third of the population below the poverty line.

We will have to take stock of the political trajectory that led a government that was carrying a popular hope well beyond the borders of this small country to where we are now. But it is not the task of the hour.

Right now, we need to mobilise and lobby:

- The Greek Government, for as long as the agreement is not signed, so that it does not do the irreparable. A capitulation of the Syriza government will have incalculable consequences for the progressive forces in Europe and in the world, we need to get the message.

- The parliamentary group of Syriza, so that its members do not vote through an agreement completely contrary to the mandate entrusted to them less than six months ago by the Greek people.

Help us raise £15,000

Jeremy Corbyn’s Labour leadership campaign has significantly shaken up left politics.

People who don’t usually orient to Labour are signing up as “supporters” to vote for Corbyn, and some are even getting actively involved in his campaign. People recognise that Corbyn’s leadership bid represents a working class voice in politics: a left-wing alternative.

Many new people are taking an interest, and more experienced activists are paying attention to the Labour Party for the first time in a while. This is an opportunity for us have discussions about the relationship of the trade union movement to Labour, about our ideas for transforming the labour movement, and the necessity of the labour movement having a fight in the Party that is supposed to represent it.

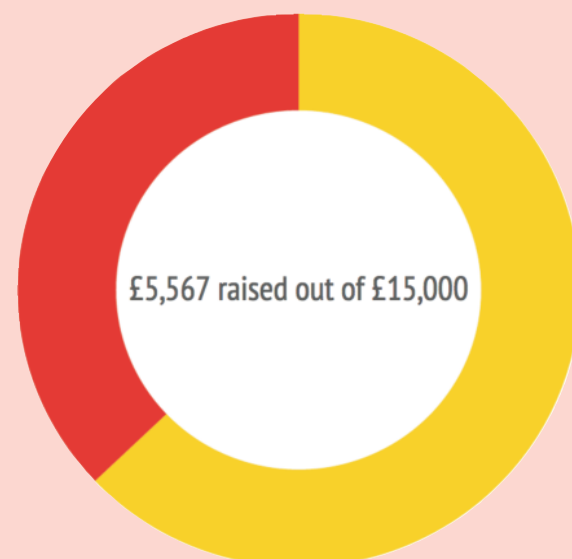
Corbyn is very unlikely to win the Labour leadership, and there is a risk some activists will be demoralised by this. We can provide a longer-term perspective for the people energised by this election campaign.

Revolutionary organisations allow us to develop, fight for and argue for these ideas, and sustain us and the people around us through the shorter-term ups and downs of political activity. Workers’ Liberty plays this role but we can’t continue to do that without workers in our office, a paper to transmit our ideas and resources for our activists — for that we always need money.

Please consider:

- Getting a subscription to our weekly newspaper, Solidarity — workersliberty.org/subscribe
- Taking out a monthly standing order.
- Making a one-off donation
- Organising a fundraising event in your local area
- Committing to do a sponsored activity and asking others to sponsor you
- Buying some of our books, posters, autocollants or pamphlets
- For information on standing orders or how to donate visit workersliberty.org/donate
- For more ideas and information on fundraising visit workersliberty.org/fundraising

Thanks this week to Andy, Hereward, Pete and those who sold and bought literature at the End Austerity Now demonstration. So far we have raised £5567.



A brave new world?

John Cunningham reviews *The Second Machine Age: Work, Progress, and Prosperity in a time of Brilliant Technologies* by Erik Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee.

According to the authors we are entering a “second machine age”.

The first came with the invention and development of the steam engine by James Watt and others in 1775. Now “computers and other digital advances are doing for mental power — the ability to use our brains to understand and shape our environments — what the steam engine did for muscle power. They’re allowing us to blow past previous limitations and taking us into new territory.”

Previously it was thought that computers, despite their prodigious capabilities, were limited at certain tasks, particularly those which require flexibility, such as human language communication, playing chess, or driving a motor vehicle. Society is now near the point where this will drastically change.

Of particularly pressing concern is the effect of the second machine age on jobs. Technological innovations have always affected jobs: this is nothing new. Automatic threshing machines when introduced in the USA in the mid-19th century reduced the agricultural workforce by 30%, but America was expanding and the unemployed could be “soaked up” by other sectors of the economy. In today’s world prospects appear grim, particularly for semi-skilled and unskilled workers.

Despite sounding some warnings about what the future may hold, the authors’ gung-ho, “can-do” attitude tends to overwhelm whatever critical edge their writing has. In fact their Ivy League preppiness (both teach at MIT) soon becomes irritating, particularly when coupled to their Americo-centrism. Their cavalier endorsement of entrepreneurship, capitalism and their worship of technology leads them to wax lyrical about a new application which has re-designed a beer bottle, only to mention in passing highly beneficial developments such as eye and cancer treatments.

While entrepreneurship exists and it would be stupid to ignore this, the authors’ main criterion for assessing its products seems to be how much money they have made, not what



Steve Jobs. Not such a great innovator?

benefits they have brought to society. Adulatory references to millionaires, billionaires and hedge fund investors abound. Apart from the ideological tunnel vision displayed this ignores the way many of the developments trumpeted by Brynjolfsson and McAfee and their idols in Silicon Valley are often not the products of geeky whizz-kid enterprise in suburban garages. To look further at this we need to go back to 1957.

The Soviet Union had just launched Sputnik and the Americans suddenly realised they were behind in the space race. In response the government established the Defense Advanced Research project Agency (DARPA). One activity of DARPA was to fund and establish computer science departments in various US universities. That led directly to the development of the computer chip at the University of California. Referring specifically to the Apple company

(Owen Jones made a similar point in a *Guardian* article), Marian Mazucatto remarks in her book *The Entrepreneurial State: Debunking Public Vs Private Sector Myths*, that,

[...] what remains relatively unknown to the average consumer is that the core technologies embedded in Apple’s innovative products are in fact the result of decades of federal support for innovation [...] nearly every state of the art technology found in the iPod, iPhone and iPad is an overlooked and ignored achievement of the research efforts and funding support of the government and the military.

So, is Steve Jobs (deceased CEO of Apple) really the brilliant innovator he is often made out to be? Or, did he develop already existing technology and make a few cute designs to put them in? In fact, compared to its rivals, Apple fares poorly in the research field. It ranks in the bottom three of 13 in terms of the proportion of revenue allocated to research and development.

Although the authors mention DARPA (in connection with the driverless car) they omit to mention anything else about it or about other government agencies in the USA: the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR), the Orphan Drug Act and the Nanotechnology Initiative — all of which have driven and initiated research which the private sector has then profited from. All the more ironic then that the authors start one section of their book with the heading “Please, no more Politburos” where they argue against any role for the state!

The authors repeat, on a number of occasions that society is driven first and foremost by technology. Technology is central to our life and it is no small matter that James Watt (and others) changed the world we live in. However, social, cultural and economic factors also determine technologies.

Nor do the authors mention how technology is used for social control. In his book *Seventeen Contradictions and the end of Capitalism*, David Harvey mentions how, “A Second Empire French industrialist renowned for his innovations in the machine tool industry openly proclaimed that his three goals were increasing precision in the labour process, increasing productivity and disempowering the worker” (emphasis added).

Further, the steam engine was not invented by James Watt;

Why banking is bad for the economy

Rich and poor
By Matt Cooper



Banking is bad for economic growth and fuels inequality. This is not the judgement of Solidarity but of the OECD, the pro-market voice of some of the biggest western economies, in their new report, *How to restore a healthy financial sector that supports long-lasting, inclusive growth*.

The report does not go as far as saying that bank credit is parasitic on the rest of the economy, but it states that for every 30 per cent growth in bank credit, one per cent is knocked off long term growth. The picture it builds is of a banking system that has boomed through neo-liberal deregulation and an ensuing anarchic and risk-taking struggle for profit, but at the same time has become “too big to fail” and thus relies on the state to be the guarantor of last resort.

State underwriting of risk allows bankers to receive disproportionately high rewards: those employed in the banking sector earn more than their equivalents in other sectors of the economy. The lowest paid bank workers earn an extra 15 per cent, the best paid are paid 40 per cent more than people at the top of other companies. Among all top earners, one in five is in the financial sector.

In 2013 the the highest paying five UK banks between them paid 738 senior staff £1.3 billion, around £1.8 million each. The top payer was Goldman Sachs, paying its 121 top staff an average of £3 million.

The impact on income distribution is staggering. The OECD estimates that for every 10 per cent expansion of the

banking sector, the gap between the richest and the poorest in society grows by nearly 1 per cent.

But not anyone can walk into one of these high paid jobs, even those with good qualifications. There are barriers of class interest, as shown by the government’s Commission on Social Mobility and Child Poverty latest report, *Non-Educational Barriers to the Elite Professions*.

The Commission’s research on recruitment practices in elite UK financial and accountancy firms showed that between 40 and 70 per cent of job offers to graduates were made to those who went to private or selective schools. (Just 10 per cent of the population attend such schools). Companies actually target their recruitment on the self-defined elite of universities (Oxbridge, and more generally the Russell Group), in which those who have been to private or selective state education are over-represented.

HIGHER

It has been well documented that students from comprehensive schools need higher grades than the privately educated to be admitted to these institutions.

Those who might be considered working class (those with parents categorised in groups 4-7 on the NS-SEC scale, which includes the self-employed, through lower management roles down to most technical and non-professional jobs) constitute less than 20 per cent of Russell Group universities’ students, and this proportion is falling.

Elite firms also define the “talent” they seek in a way skewed toward those from wealthy backgrounds, particularly by selecting those who interviewers see as having self-confidence and “polish”. Such attributes have replaced

crude perceptions of class, such as accent, and contain a pretence of reflecting a skill. In reality they are about the class culture and upbringing which wealth can buy.

When these elite firms send their recruiting teams to elite universities, the social evenings, coaching and mock interviews that aspiring applicants go through are more likely to act as barriers based on class than to break barriers down.

The interview process itself, in part at least, consists of selection by class prejudice barely hidden under spurious concepts of “motivation”, “communication” and “drive”. As one recruiter put it:

“Intellectual capacity, analytical ability, teamwork, ... commitment levels, communication, and lastly, are they a fit for the firm, frankly, so there will be a big personality test. One of the questions that’s always asked is are they a [Firm X] person? It is an instinctive thing ... the key characteristic for a [Firm X] trainee is to be nice ... And the other test is the roommate test. Are they someone you want to share a room with?”

The Social Mobility Commission demands nothing more than a fairer selection process based on the spurious notion of “merit”. The OECD would like to see banks reformed so they need fewer state guarantees and less incentive for business to rely on bank credit.

But both organisations have given us further evidence of a system that is not only rotten, but is rotting further and creating even greater inequality and injustice.

Sources:

- bit.ly/1QO3faE
- bit.ly/1LrKfex
- on.ft.com/1BySUZI

58 years earlier Denis Papin of Marburg University designed and built a steam engine for a boat which he then sailed down the local river. The authorities, afraid of the reaction of riverside employers and workers, destroyed his invention and Papin spent the rest of his life as an exiled pauper in England.

Less dramatically, the technology for synchronised sound in the film exhibition industry existed long before its introduction as the (incorrectly labelled) “talkie”. The economic environment and the lack of a suitable cinematic infrastructure kept movies silent until Warner Brothers took a gamble on it to revive their flagging fortunes in 1929.

Technology does not and should not dictate to us how we live our lives. How and when technology is used is a mix of social, economic and, ultimately, political decisions. Few would advocate a modern-day version of Luddism (machine-breaking) and the primary criterion must be — does a

particular technological innovation benefit humankind? Clearly, the consequences of the second machine age for employment are central. Estimates vary but millions of jobs are bound to disappear, particularly as, globally, the South catches up with the North. The authors appear breezily confident that those made redundant will find some kind of work elsewhere by some process of market adjustment.

Given the numbers involved, this seems hopelessly unrealistic and they are, unsurprisingly, thin on detail. They even fail to ask such obvious questions as who, if millions no longer have any work (or precarious work at best), will buy the products produced by the new technology? By contrast trade unionists and socialists should be developing ideas about work-sharing schemes and a drastic reduction in working hours. Andre Gorz, the French writer who has much of interest to say about “post-industrial society”, suggested that a thousand hour *year* is perfectly feasible and could be re-

alised within a comparatively short period of time.

Personally, I don’t want a “talking fridge” which will tell me when I’m running out of butter. I already have two apps for this — they’re called eyes (blind people may however benefit from this technology). Nor am I bothered about the shape of my beer bottle, as long as the contents meet my exacting standards. Along with, I’m sure, the readers of *Solidarity* I want to see a society where technology neither enslaves humanity, nor reduces us to the level of idiots mindlessly consuming the latest gadget or app. A world where free time is expanded and the hours necessary for tedious and soul-destroying work are drastically reduced.

For this to happen technology needs to be shaped to use-value and social need, not left to the whims of Silicon Valley whizz-kids, billionaires, hedge funders and their MIT cheerleaders.

Another automation is possible

Bruce Robinson reviews “The Glass Cage: Where Automation is Taking Us” by Nicholas Carr.

Automation is everywhere. From robots on production lines to the cockpits of planes; from automated market trading to highly skilled medical diagnosis via a whole range of blue and white collar occupations, few jobs seem to be immune to the replacement of human, living labour by computerised systems.

One report has recently predicted that as much as 47% of US employment is at risk. This is not just futuristic hype: the US has just gone through a “jobless recovery” from the 2008 crisis.

Automation also affects our everyday life outside work. The GPS maps in our phone or car; the algorithms (procedures that underlie computer programs) that learn about our activity on Facebook and suggest friends or things to do; the driverless cars that Google is developing — all take previously human tasks such as finding our way or our friends and turn them over to machines.

There are two inadequate responses found on the left. The first is just to fight defensive battles and seek to preserve jobs or oppose the introduction of new technology. The second is just to marvel at how capitalism develops technology that would enable life to be better with less work and abundance under “fully automated luxury communism”. Both immediate struggles and visions of the future but both fail to look at the processes and technologies that underlie automation and thus to develop a critical approach that would enable us to decide what should be kept and what rejected from current technological developments.

Nicholas Carr’s *The Glass Cage* seeks to do that. Carr is not anti-technology but has written several books critical of how technology is remodelling the way we live and what it means to be human. His aim is to “humanise technology”. *The Glass Cage* gathers material from a wide range of research across many disciplines.

Carr starts by pointing out that automation has gone beyond the point where it is vulnerable to the critique that there are forms of knowledge, learnt through experience and often subconscious, that cannot be translated into computer programs. Today computing power is fast and cheap enough to solve these problems by other means — essentially the brute force of calculation as seen in Big Blue’s defeat of chess champion Gary Kasparov. “The strategies are different, the outcomes for practical purposes are the same.”

Why not then simply embrace automation, particularly when computers are more consistent than humans? Much of the rest of the book is dedicated to explaining why we shouldn’t, how the outcomes do differ and why automation as practised today can have bad effects, often unexpected.

Carr discusses effects that result from the way automation “alters the character of the entire task, including the roles, attitudes and skills of the people who take part in it.” Jobs, such as that of airline pilot, are reduced to watching over an automated system — the glass cockpit — with little sense of the real world beyond the screen. The skills needed to deal with unexpected events deteriorate, users are lulled into a false sense of security because the system is there, and they can believe wrong or misleading information coming from the system, even when their senses or experience tell them otherwise.



Who needs or wants the self-drive car?

In other professional jobs such as architecture and medicine the easy availability and enforced use of support systems can lead to a closing down of possibilities and resorts to pre-defined stereotypical solutions. This, as Carr points out, is not a consequence of the use of computers per se but rather the assumptions and range of possible actions built in to the software by its designer. “The character and the goals of the work... are shaped by the machine’s capabilities.” Use of the system thus comes to shape the way work is seen and carried out.

DESKILLING

The deskilling that can result from the mediation of work by intelligent systems is not restricted to the skills needed to do a particular job but, with their widespread adoption, can undermine broader human capacities.

Carr talks about how the hard acquired skills of an Inuit tribe in navigating the Arctic landscape for hunting is giving way to the use of cheap, easy to use GPS systems with dangerous results.

Closer to home, London cabbies armed with “The Knowledge” of London drummed into in their heads are doing battle with Uber’s cheaper minicabs, controlled by a computer app with drivers using GPS systems. Carr argues that GPS use does away with map reading skills and provides a one-dimensional, impoverished view of our environment which leads to a loss of appreciation of the world around us as well as our ability to solve spatial problems for ourselves.

Further, what artificial intelligence pioneer turned critic Joseph Weizenbaum described as the shift from judgement to calculation leaves us dependent on systems that cannot take ethical decisions. While humans can be wrong, they can weigh the possible consequences of their actions. Automated systems, even with powerful learning abilities, cannot deal with the full context and wide-ranging possibilities of everyday decisions. Carr gives the example of how a driverless car might react to an animal or a child crossing its path and the different considerations a human might implicitly use to de-

cide in an instant.

What then are the alternatives? In a chapter entitled “Automation for the People”, Carr explores approaches to systems design that reject the assumptions that technology should simply aim to replace humans. Human-centred design aims to build systems around the user, seeking a division of labour between human and machine that aims to build on human skills, providing interfaces that do not reduce the user to as mere monitor of the system with an unchallenging job.

This approach has been around since at least the 80s but has not been widely adopted. Why? “Concerns about the effects of computers on people’s minds and bodies have been trumped by the desire to achieve maximum efficiency, speed and precision — or [“and”, surely? BR] turn as big a profit as possible.” Another automation is possible but not without challenging the priorities and goals of capital.

Carr does not draw this conclusion and in the end, despite occasional mentions of the real drivers of automation such as the reduction of labour costs, he seems to have no perspective for doing anything about it beyond hoping those in a position of power take note. At the same time he encourages a resistance “to bring progress down to earth... our highest obligation is to resist any force that would enfeeble or enervate the soul.”

“We have an obligation to be more involved in decisions about [technologies’] design and use — before technological momentum forecloses our options”, he rightly comments, but provides no clue as to how this might happen; no mention of how trade unions, left political parties and the broad anti-capitalist movements might — and should — engage with these questions. Nothing about the need for technology development processes to be democratised and opened up or for alliances between technologists and those affected by their work to enable this. All of which perspectives flow from his analysis of what’s wrong.

In the end, then, Carr provides no perspective for action. Instead he ends the book with a misplaced attack on those who see work-replacing technologies, with all qualifications and desirable changes to their nature, as an integral part of human liberation. “To cede choices about the texture of our daily lives to a grand abstraction called progress is folly.” This ignores that a desirable daily life must depend on a level of material wealth and free time that in turn depends on technology. Humanising technology cannot mean ignoring its economic benefits and how they might be realised in a different society.

Carr raises many of the critical questions that should be asked about one of the dominant technological trends today. He does so in a wide-ranging and non-technical way that makes the book easy to read. In the end his radical humanism does not supply a way out but it flags up to the left why a critical analysis of technology is necessary.

In the 80s unions and the left were seriously concerned about the consequences of microprocessor technology and talked about strategies to deal with it. We need to rekindle that discussion today.

Turin, Gramsci, and Italy's "red years"

At Ideas for Freedom 2015, 2-5 July at Birkbeck College, London, Becky Crocker and Martin Thomas will run a workshop on the events in Turin and in the rest of Italy between 1919-20. Here Martin Thomas explains some of that history.

By Martin Thomas

The red years: 1919-20

I
The Russian workers' revolution of October 1917 and the end of World War 1 in November 1918 were followed by a wave of economic turmoil and working-class radicalisation across Europe, and especially in Italy.

Strikes, many of them victorious, surged in early 1919. The Italian Socialist Party (PSI) was led by declared revolutionaries, known in the jargon of the time as "maximalists", and adhered to the Communist International as soon as it was founded in March 1919. The PSI increased its membership many times over; so did the main union confederation, the CGL, led by Socialists, and the smaller syndicalist and anarchist confederations, USI and UAI. Peasants seized land.

Right-wing nationalists were also active. On 15 April 1919 they set fire to the office of the PSI paper *Avanti*. From September 1919 to December 1920, the city of *Fiume* (since 1945 in Croatia, but then mostly Italian-populated, and pre-war in the Austro-Hungarian empire) was ruled by a nationalist militia.

But the main trend was to the left. In June-July 1919, food-price riots spread from the north-west, near Genoa, across the north, and in some areas the local *camere di lavoro* (equivalent of trades councils) took power: one historian reckons that as "the most insurrectionary moment of the post-war crisis". On 20-21 July, a would-be international general strike in solidarity with the beleaguered Russian soviet republic and the about-to-fall Hungarian soviet republic was large in Italy though it failed elsewhere.

II
In summer 1919 even the most ardent left-wingers in the PSI thought further preparation was needed before a revolutionary uprising could succeed.

Amadeo Bordiga, a distinctive figure on the left of the PSI since 1912, called for the formation of a properly communist party by the expulsion of the reformists who, though a small minority in the PSI, dominated the PSI parliamentary group and the CGL leadership: "Separating us from that is a short period, which can and should be overcome with the implementation of a specific program of action, but can not be skipped with miraculous advances" (Platform for the Communist Faction, July 1919).

In Turin, a new PSI left group, separate from Bordiga, was emerging around a new weekly, *Ordine Nuovo*, launched on 1 May 1919 and sustained by funds won in the local labour movement by Angelo Tasca. Its editor, Antonio Gramsci, wrote on 12 July that "in the present conditions of proletarian organisation", a revolutionary uprising could achieve no more than "a purely formal correction of the democratic state". "The forces of the democratic state and of the capitalist class are still immense" and could be sapped only by "a preparatory period involving organisation and propaganda".

Both Bordiga and Gramsci, in their different ways, stressed the need to build a more solid basis of working-class organisation so that an Italian revolution could avoid the fate of the Hungarian soviet republic of March-August 1919, and the Bavarian soviet republics of April 1919, both soon overthrown and followed by white terror.

III
From 21 June 1919 *Ordine Nuovo* campaigned for the replacement of the "internal commissions" — rather bureaucratic consultative bodies in the factories, effectively appointed by the trade union officials — by factory councils elected by all the workers, workshop-by-workshop.

It cited the soviets in Russia, the shop stewards' committees in Britain (which, unknown before then, had emerged during World War 1) and the activity of the IWW in the USA,



Antonio Gramsci

as models.

Ordine Nuovo's campaign succeeded. From the end of August 1919, councils spread through all the big factories of Turin, which, unlike all other Italian cities, was dominated by large, modern metal works. In the main Fiat factory, for example, 250 delegates were elected, with an executive sub-committee of five. In late 1919 the Turin PSI and Turin's unions were won to support of the councils.

Ordine Nuovo had argued for the councils to be only a beginning, and then to link up with other groups in neighbourhood soviets and a national congress of factory councils. Those extensions did not happen. The PSI nationally discussed and even adopted elaborate plans for the creation of soviets (councils), but in token, bureaucratic form.

Meanwhile the PSI leaders had focused on the parliamentary elections of 15 November. They outstripped all other parties, with 32% of the vote. 21% of the vote went to the Popolari, a Catholic party founded only in 1919 (the Church had previously favoured abstention from voting) which combined conservatives with so-called "white Bolsheviks". As for decades, the government was still formed by a cabal of liberal politicians based on networks of influence and patronage rather than real political-party organisation, but they were now a minority in parliament.

At the first session of parliament, the PSI deputies walked out in protest at the presence of the king. They were attacked by nationalists. A wave of protest strikes swept Italy.

The PSI had held its congress on 5-8 October. In early 1919 Bordiga had come out for abstention from elections; that must have helped marginalise him at the congress, where he won only 5% of the votes, with 95% going to the "maximalists" and the reformists keeping quiet. (The abstentionism was a reaction to the PSI majority's electoral focus, rather than a principle for all times and places. Bordiga dropped it after summer 1920). Angelo Tasca from the *Ordine Nuovo* group voted with the "maximalists". Later Gramsci would write: "In 1919-20 we made extremely serious mistakes"; he and his friends had not been confident enough to "form a faction and organise it throughout Italy".

By January 1920 Antonio Gramsci agreed with Bordiga on the need to carve out an actively-revolutionary communist party from the revolutionary-talking PSI. He called for the creation of "communist groups" in workplaces and unions, and mapped out priorities: bring together the factory councils into a city workers' council; spread factory councils across Italy and call a national congress; arm the workers; organise worker-peasant links. He disagreed with Bordiga's line of abstaining from elections.

IV
From 17 February, factory occupations erupted in the Genoa area, near Turin, and in Naples.

They were led by syndicalists (activists who believed in making revolution by trade-union action alone, without po-

litical-party activity), who deployed the occupations as a tactic in wage battles, to forestall lockouts. Troops evicted the occupiers after two to four days.

Ordine Nuovo (13 March) hailed "a new fact in the history of class struggle", but warned against syndicalist illusions. "The workshop is revealed as a cell of an organism that still has a formidable power of resistance", concentrated in "the supreme body of the bosses' society: the state". Bordiga was cooler. In general he argued that "strikes are the great practice exercises for the socialist political revolution" (*Il Soviet*, 6 July 1919), but he described the occupations as typifying "endless and useless adventures that are daily exhausting the working masses" (*Il Soviet*, 22 February).

In March 1920 the edgy industrialists resolved on a counter-offensive against the factory councils. 50,000 troops were drafted into Turin. The bosses picked on a small dispute about clocks being changed to daylight-saving time to sack some delegates and then declare a general lock-out when the unions called for sit-in strikes in response.

After two weeks, the metalworkers' delegates decided to concede. The bosses then demanded an end to activity by the factory councils in work hours. The workers responded with a general strike in defence of the factory councils, which spread beyond the metalworks to every other sector and to rural workers in the surrounding countryside.

The PSI and the CGL leaders refused to spread the struggle. It was not the right time for a general confrontation, they said. Syndicalists around Genoa and elsewhere struck, but by 24 April the Turin workers were forced to admit defeat. The factory councils survived, but much weakened.

V
In May Gramsci sharpened his call for the creation of a new party out of the PSI; but his comrades on *Ordine Nuovo*, Tasca, Togliatti, Terracini, moved towards the PSI mainstream. In the 24 July elections for the Turin PSI committee, he was isolated.

In June 1920 soldiers mutinied at Ancona (on the east coast: against being sent to Albania), and the mutiny triggered a flurry of local uprisings. The same month the metalworkers' union federation FIOM presented wage demands. Rising prices were making working-class life impossible. The bosses stalled. FIOM and the syndicalists of USI, reckoning that with order books thin the bosses would welcome a strike, called a work-to-rule from 21 August.

On 30 August Alfa-Romeo, in Milan, locked out its workers. This sparked the climactic confrontation. Within days factory occupations spread across Italy, and beyond the metalworks, partly triggered by other bosses' lockouts. In Turin, the occupations dominated the city.

Many workers felt that at last, if not by their choice, the decisive confrontation had arrived. The first Sunday of the occupations, 5 September, saw huge assemblies in the factory, with songs and speeches.

The factory councils took control. Production was continued, partly in order to lay the basis for later demanding pay for the days of occupation (which in fact was largely won), partly to show that the workers could run the factories without the bosses. The occupations were widespread enough, and support from railworkers was strong enough, to maintain supplies. Strict order was kept in the factories, with a ban on alcohol. Factories armed their own "red guards" to protect them. When rumours spread of a military attack on the factories, working-class women (the factory workers were mainly men) rushed to the factory gates, with their children, to stand in defence. "Communist kitchens" fed the people.

Gramsci hailed the occupations: "Social hierarchies have been smashed and historical values turned upside down. The 'executive' classes, the 'instrumental' classes, have become the 'controlling' classes". He urgently demanded city-wide soviets and strengthening and coordination of the red guards. He had no party organisation to drive those demands into the movement.

The PSI leaders put out a typically windy manifesto (6 September), calling for "proletarians in uniform" to resist their officers and peasants (engaged in land occupations at the same time, but without any link) to rally. "Take over the communes, the lands, disarm the carabinieri, form your battalions in unity with the workers... For the day of justice and liberty is perhaps at hand!" The "*perhaps*" said it all. Gramsci did not argue that the occupations could lead directly to rev-

olution, but they could win “real guarantees” for the factory councils (14 September).

Bordiga himself was outside Italy, on his way back from the Second Congress of the Comintern in Moscow. According to one historian, his paper *Il Soviet* “throughout September... managed never even to mention the occupation in its editorials”.

Lenin’s comment at the Third Congress of the Comintern was unfair to Gramsci: “Did a single Communist show his mettle when the workers seized the factories in Italy? No. At that time, there was as yet no communism in Italy; there was a certain amount of anarchism, but no Marxian communism”. But Gramsci could do little to “show mettle” with only 18 organised co-thinkers.

The PSI and CGL called a conference on 10-11 September. Togliatti, representing Turin, was asked by the CGL leaders whether Turin would take the lead in an insurrection. No, he replied: after the betrayal of the April general strike by the PSI and CGL, the surrounding countryside had turned hostile. The CGL leaders offered their resignations: the PSI leaders said no.

The PSI leaders moved a motion at the conference, probably counting on its defeat, which called for the CGL formally to hand over the dispute to the PSI, “to lead it towards the maximum solution of the socialist programme”. 590,000 delegate votes, against 410,000, defeated that motion in favour of a CGL leadership proposal to continue the dispute for “union control”. The PSI leaders announced that, since this was now an “economic” dispute, they would leave its running to the CGL.

Pressured by the government, the industrialists agreed to negotiate with the CGL. On 19 September a deal was struck: a wage rise, pay for the period of the work-to-rule, no victimisations, local negotiations over pay for the period of the occupations. The deal included agreement to work out proposals for legislation for union control in industry; nothing came of that but talk.

On 24 September the metalworkers voted to accept this deal, though many abstained. After local battles over pay for the period of the occupations, which the workers mostly won, work had resumed everywhere by 30 September.

VI

Many of the Turin metalworkers, the strongest section of the occupation movement, went back to work feeling betrayed. Gramsci reported their mood as “disillusioned and threatened with dissolution”.

But elsewhere workers marched out with red flags flying. PSI leader Serrati was even jubilant: “the bosses surrender”. There was no general or crushing sentiment of defeat. Bordiga, just back from Moscow, shrugged: “We must postpone the struggle to overthrow the bourgeois regime to a more opportune moment”.

Nor did the bosses feel triumphant. Just a few days after the return to work, Agnelli, the boss of Fiat, formally proposed to transform the giant corporation into a cooperative: the workers refused.

Yet soon the workers were on the defensive, pushed back again and again. Escalating economic crisis and layoffs were part of it. We can guess, also, that many workers felt that now they had tried everything — uprisings, votes in elections, strikes, factory councils, occupations, red guards — and nothing prevailed.

As the veteran Italian anarchist Errico Malatesta had said in early 1920: “If we let the favorable moment pass we will have to pay later in tears of blood for the fear that we now instill in the bourgeoisie”. Or Gramsci: “The present phase of the class struggle in Italy is one that precedes: either the conquest of political power on the part of the revolutionary proletariat... or a tremendous reaction on the part of the property classes and governing caste” (*Ordine Nuovo*, 8 May 1920).

Within a couple of months, Mussolini’s previously-small fascist movement was smashing up union buildings and socialist newspaper offices, and beating or killing left-wing activists, in a sweep which started with fascist gangs going out from cities in the North to destroy union organisation in the surrounding countryside, and spread wider and wider. The police and the army stood by, approvingly.

The Turin factory councils, weakened by mass lay-offs, were destroyed by a lock-out from 5 April to 2 May 1921, enforced by military occupation of the factories. Then in October 1922, the fascists came to power. Only the PSI and the Communist Party — finally separated from the PSI in January 1921 — voted against the law which, with armed fascists lining the walls of the parliamentary chamber, Mussolini put through to rig himself a parliamentary majority. The liberal politicians who had ruled Italy for decades thought they had



Activists from a Turin factory council

done their bit, and voted for Mussolini.

They had indeed done their bit. The veteran prime minister, Giovanni Giolitti, responded cannily to the September 1920 factory occupations. On holiday when they started, he continued his holiday, and then took a scheduled trip to France. Anxious ministers told him they would resign if he went to France; well, he replied, that was a pity, but he was going.

Fiat boss Agnelli travelled to Giolitti’s holiday home to ask him to send troops to break the occupations. No, said Giolitti, he wouldn’t put troops where they could be shot down from the high walls of the factories. He could and did put troops into the city centres. And, he told Agnelli, he could break the occupations.... if Agnelli really wanted him to use cannon to bombard the Fiat factories. “No, no, no”, replied the distraught Agnelli.

Mobilising like-minded bourgeois opinion, particularly bankers, Giolitti sat out the occupations and then pressured the industrialists into negotiating. Then in 1921 he would form an electoral bloc with Mussolini’s fascists.

As Gramsci had noted back in July 1919, even with bourgeois civil society in Italy thoroughly in turmoil, the capitalist state’s reserve power remained. And the workers never developed an organisation adequate to undermine it.

“Not very different from Russia”

I

Gramsci’s comment best-known today is from his later *Prison Notebooks*: “In the East, the State was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West, there was a proper relationship between State and civil society, and when the State trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed”.

It has been extrapolated from to suggest that in Russia, in 1917, it was right for workers to make a revolution and smash the bourgeois state, but in modern Europe socialist politics can only be a milder business of burrowing bit by bit at the structure of civil society.

The extrapolation is radically wrong, and so was Gramsci’s original comment. In Russia, the state machine had been broken up by the revolution of February 1917. The workers’ revolution of October 1917 denied that state machine a chance to reconstitute itself, rather than running up against it when it was in full vigour.

And in Italy, when civil society trembled, a sturdy state structure saved the day for the bourgeoisie.

In 1919-20 Bordiga saw a sharp difference between “East” (Russia) and “West” (Italy). His policy of abstaining from elections in Italy, though he reckoned the Bolsheviks had been right to contest such elections as they could in Russia, was based on that difference. Gramsci, by contrast, argued

that “historical conditions in Italy were not and are not very different from those in Russia” (*Ordine Nuovo*, 2 August 1919).

Of all countries in the world, Italy was arguably the closest to Russia in its combination of rapidly-grown large-scale modern industry in some cities with great stretches of almost-medieval peasant poverty. Italy’s agriculture, overall, was not more productive than Russia’s. Coal consumption per head, a good index then of industrialisation, was 300kg in Russia and 270kg in Italy.

II

Italy was much more urbanised than Russia, with a bigger urban petty bourgeoisie and more people who lived in towns but worked on the land.

It had been a more-or-less liberal democracy since unification in 1860-70, when the rest of Italy was brought under the constitution of Piedmont.

The industrial centres of Turin, Milan, and Genoa were less central to Italian life than St Petersburg and Moscow in Russia. Less-industrial Naples, Rome, Palermo, Florence, Venice, Bologna were as large, or larger.

Italy’s rural structures were more varied, ranging from peasants scratching an almost medieval existence in the south to relatively productive (and sometimes unionised) sharecroppers, owner-farmers, and rural workers in the north.

Emigration to and remittances from the USA and Argentina were important in the South. Many southern villages were more connected with New York than with any city in Italy. When unemployment in the USA rose to 17% in 1921, and it introduced tight restrictions on immigration (May 1921), that sharpened pressures in rural Italy.

III

Gramsci denounced the PSI’s traditional focus on Northern workers and sometimes peasants, and its neglect of the South. But he had few developed ideas of an alternative, and, isolated in Turin, no means of implementing them.

Frustrated and angry, he scorned the urban petty bourgeoisie as “a servile, abject horde of hirelings and lackeys” and offered the people of Rome this prospect: “As a city, Rome has no role whatsoever in Italian social intercourse; it represents nothing. Rome will be subjected to the iron laws against parasites that the workers’ state will enact” (*Ordine Nuovo*, 17 January 1920).

In the writings of Bordiga available today, it is hard to find much at all about the petty-bourgeoisie, urban or rural. The meticulous care with which he explained that the future workers’ councils would disenfranchise even those workers who had a little property income (though he wrote “such cases are not infrequent among us”) was ill-calculated to win over a minority or neutralise a majority (*Il Soviet*, 14 September 1919).

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Turin, Gramsci, and Italy's "red years"

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Party, councils, revolution

Gramsci wrote of "the idea of workers' liberty being realised in practice initially in the factory council" (*Ordine Nuovo*, 28 August 1920).

This need not be interpreted in terms of the syndicalist flourishes which sometimes got into his polemics, and which he himself contradicted: "the occupation of the factories... cannot be seen as an experience of communist society" (*Avanti*, 2 September 1920).

The essential thought here is that the precondition for the moment of working-class winning of state power is a process, often slow, in pre-revolutionary times fast, of building workers' democratic organisation which can subsist to some degree within bourgeois society and which also forms the basis, in the chief pores of economy and society, for future working-class rule.

In his *History of the Russian Revolution*, Trotsky describes how in the final overthrow of the Provisional Government and the taking of power by the Soviets "demonstrations, street fights, barricades — everything comprised in the usual idea of insurrection — were almost entirely absent". They were absent because of "the preceding crowding-out [by the soviets, led by the Bolsheviks] of the government" and because the small group who seized the Winter Palace "had behind them in the workers' districts and the barracks an overwhelming majority, consolidated, organised, disciplined".

That "crowding-out" cannot be a peaceful, gradual slide from 40% of workers' power, then to 49%, and then to the magic 51%. (Some such "gradual revolution" seems to have been in the minds of the reformist PSI leaders in 1919-20). As Gramsci warned again and again, the factory councils would have to extend into city-wide soviets with red guards, a national network of factory councils, and an alliance with the peasantry, or be crushed.

But workers' revolution is not a jump from a standing start, or a mere crescendo of demonstrations and strikes. It has to be based on deep-rooted organisation. Gramsci's motto is a restatement, for the working class, of Hegel's declaration: "Freedom does not exist as original and natural. Rather must it be first sought out and won; and that by an incalculable medial discipline of the intellectual and moral powers" (*Philosophy of History*, §43).

II

Bordiga's criticisms of *Ordine Nuovo* on the factory councils had some justice. Before January 1920, the implied message of Gramsci's articles was the factory council movement would of itself renew the PSI.

Some of Gramsci's articles in *Ordine Nuovo* were syndicalist, "factory-ist": "the factory council is the model of the proletarian state" (*Ordine Nuovo*, 11 October 1919).

Though Bordiga didn't spell it out, a focus on factory councils at the expense of locality-based workers' councils must have meant an almost exclusive focus on male workers (the big majority in the metalworks) and a neglect of working-class women.

Giacinto Serrati, the "maximalist" leader of the PSI in 1919-20, was a sincere revolutionary despite his strategic inadequacies, and would end up in the Communist Party from 1924. He was for the dictatorship of the proletariat (workers' rule), but equated it with "the conscious dictatorship of the Socialist Party". He also accepted a dichotomy between "political" and "economic" struggles, codified in a PSI-CGL accord of 1918 which said that the CGL would decide on economic struggles and the PSI on political.

That left Serrati, not opposing the stormy workers' battles of 1919-20, but wishing they took place in a more orderly and cautious way, feeding neatly into the growth of the PSI.

Gramsci rejected the equation. The party is a voluntary organisation, not a structure of the whole working class. German Social Democracy, said Gramsci, had made the same equation as Serrati and thus "shackled the revolution, domesticated it" (*Ordine Nuovo* 27 December 1919).

Councils would sometimes have anarchist, syndicalist, or popular majorities, at least initially (*Ordine Nuovo*, 29 November 1919). The party must win its majority, not have it by

decree. "The party and trade unions should not project themselves as tutors or as ready-made superstructures for [the factory council movement]... They should project themselves as the conscious agents of its liberation from the restrictive forces concentrated in the bourgeois State" (*Ordine Nuovo* 5 June 1920).

Ordine Nuovo's theories, so Gramsci wrote, were "nothing other than a translation into Italian historical conditions of ideas developed by comrade Lenin... and the ideas of the American Marxist Daniel De Leon" (*Ordine Nuovo*, 28 August 1920).

The American communist John Reed wrote that Lenin had told him that De Leon (fl.1890-1914) was "the only one who had added anything to socialist thought since Marx". De Leon's contribution was to create a precise (though, in De Leon's own version, mechanical and unrealistic) scheme of the integration of political and economic struggle, and of how day-to-day economic struggle, or rather the organisation building up from it, fed into political revolution.

Industrial unions should be built up, argued De Leon, so that eventually they would have a structure sufficient to "lock out the capitalist class". "Where the General Executive Board of the Industrial Workers of the World [the revolutionary union movement in the US at the time] will sit, there will be the nation's capital" (*The Socialist Reconstruction of Society*).

Political agitation and electioneering was necessary to enable the growth of the union movement and to clear the political obstacles to its economic rule. "Without political organisation, the labour movement cannot triumph; without economic organisation, the day of its political triumph would be the day of its defeat".

Gramsci, drawing on Lenin, and with some fumbling, corrected De Leon. Unions, even industrial unions, inevitably built around labour-market bargaining, would inevitably tend to have a limited membership, a membership mostly inactive in normal times, and a layer of officials geared to bargaining. The comprehensive, responsive, broad organisation of the working class really able to "lock out the capitalist class", if supplemented by political action tackling the state, would have to be factory councils and soviets.

III

Gramsci had a clearer picture than De Leon of the action of the permanent, unelected capitalist state machine, able to sustain capitalist power even when the factories have been seized by the workers, as in Italy in September 1920 or in Catalonia in 1936-7.

He thus moved towards understanding the need to build a revolutionary socialist party, sufficiently compact, alert, quick-moving, determined, disciplined, and well-embedded in the workplaces and neighbourhoods that in time of mass revolutionary working-class organisation "below" and political breakdown "above" it can take the initiative to create a workers' government and to break up the old state machine.

Italy 1919-20 was an object lesson in the historic imperative for revolutionary socialists to build such a party, or at least a strong initial framework for it, *in advance* of the times when bourgeois normality breaks down.

In summer 1920, when Gramsci had clearly formulated what was needed for a revolutionary socialist party in Italy, and had temporarily been abandoned by his chief former *Ordine Nuovo* comrades as they swayed towards the "maximalists", his own group in the PSI, which he called the "communist education group", had just 18 members.

Bordiga had been a left oppositionist in the PSI since 1912; but he did not form his communist faction until October 1919, and then had only 67 section delegates at the PSI congress out of well over 1000.

Both those small groups, Gramsci's and Bordiga's, had much to learn (including from each other) before they could form even the skeleton of an adequate revolutionary socialist party.

A cardinal difference between Italy and Russia is that before the start of Russia's "red years", there was already an organised, compact, ready-for-action revolutionary socialist party, the Bolsheviks — small but not tiny, well-embedded, and well-trained.

The Bolsheviks were initially overwhelmed to some degree by a huge influx of newly-active people who went first to the milder, easier-option socialistic parties, the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries. The Bolsheviks went through many crises and blunders in 1917. The party almost had to remake itself. Leon Trotsky would argue later, in *Lessons of October*, that this is a general rule for revolutionary socialist parties in revolutionary times.

But the Bolshevik party *could* remake itself, quickly enough and without falling apart. That made the difference. And it was due to the work done before the crisis, much of it in adverse times where all their best efforts could achieve no more than to hold a small group together and keep it on the right track.

Revolutionary socialist victory in "red years" can be made or unmade by what has been done, or what has not been done, in the previous colourless years.



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Unison for Corbyn

By a conference delegate

Just over 3000 delegates met in Glasgow for Unison's National Delegate Conference, 16-19 June.

The conference was taking place in the midst of two disputes with Glasgow City Council, as well as strikes involving members at London Met and Barnet Council.

The Glasgow homelessness caseworkers remain on strike and a large rally on the Thursday of around 1000 delegates saw activists take to George Square to protest against the actions of the Council with speakers including a striker, the Glasgow City Unison Branch Secretary, and Unison General Secretary Dave Prentis and a victimised rep, Robert O'Donnell, who worked at conference venue, SECC.

Delegates overwhelmingly passed a motion to condemn the actions of the SECC and to remove it from the list of approved venues for Unison unless recognition is granted and Robert reinstated.

VACUOUS

Dave Prentis addressed conference (speech at: unisonactive.blogspot) noting that Jeremy Corbyn's candidacy would make the election for Labour leader more interesting but not committing to supporting him.

Most of the rest of the speech appeared vacuous from a leader who has refused to fight for members and has backed down during every major dispute.

On conference floor itself there was little of controversy, with almost the entirety of motions discussed being passed unanimously. Once again through a complicated process of prioritisation through the regions, NEC, branches and self organised groups, some of the more controversial motions which would have sparked more lively debate

were not heard. These included a motion from Lambeth on branch funding which would seek to empower branches to have greater access to Unison's membership subs and a motion from Newcastle City branch "A Europe fit for workers", supported by Workers' Liberty delegates, which would have committed Unison to campaign for a vote to remain within the EU in the upcoming referendum.

A motion setting out Unison guidelines on "Gendered violence against women" was finally passed after several years of undemocratic stalling and dismissal by the Unison leadership and some sections of the left. More speakers attempted to speak on this than on any other motion. The motion passed unanimously on Wednesday afternoon.

Outside of conference Workers' Liberty delegates distributed our bulletin and sold *Solidarity*. We were also heavily involved in building support for Jeremy Corbyn to get on the ballot during Local Government conference and in building a fringe meeting for Unison members during the national delegate conference. 45 delegates and other supporters attended the STUC fringe meeting to hear speakers including Bernie Gallagher of Unison NEC and Neil Findlay MSP discuss getting Unison to commit to support Corbyn and the importance of supporting a fight in the labour movement for affiliated unions to back Corbyn.

A 120 people attended a hustings to try and decide a single left candidate for General Secretary (a report can be found at bit.ly/HustingsReport). Workers' Liberty Unison members will continue to discuss our attitude to the General Secretary election.

However whether there will even be a General Secretary election has been called into question (see bit.ly/GenSecElection).

Strike to stop cuts in FE

By Gemma Short

UCU members at seven London colleges struck today as *Solidarity* went to press (Tuesday 23 June) in disputes over job losses.

Strikes will happen at College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London, South Thames College, College of North West London, Croydon College, Greenwhich Community College, Hackney Community College, and Lewisham Southwark College (LeSoCo).

Today's strike is the fourth for workers at LeSoCo, who struck on Thursday 18 and Friday 19 June. Management plan to cut as many as 175 jobs at the college and close the



Camberwell site, severely reducing the quality of education for students and the ability for the most needy to access courses.

On Thursday March 18

Hackney UCU members struck and organised a "march to the city" to protest against cuts in FE funding.

On today's strike UCU members will be marching to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

Tube unions set for strikes

By Ollie Moore

ASLEF, the union organising the majority of drivers on London Underground, has returned a 98% majority for strikes on an 81% turnout in its dispute over pay and the settlement around the introduction of 24-hour running ("Night Tube").

It has named a 24-hour strike, beginning on the evening of 8 July and ending on the evening of 9 July. The three other Tube unions, RMT, TSSA, and Unite, have strike ballots

due back on 30 June and are expected to coordinate their action with ASLEF's named date.

Unions are demanding a collectively-negotiated agreement for the introduction of Night Tube. London Underground has attempted to devolve consultation on drivers' rosters to local level, without a network-wide agreement. Station staff also face the imposition of new, anti-social rosters and a new set of terms and conditions that would allow management to change their shifts at 24 hours' notice and send

them to work anywhere up to 45 minutes from their station.

RMT is demanding a four-day, 32-hour week for all grades, arguing that more time off work is the only way to offset the negative health impacts of prolonged shift working, and particularly night working. RMT has also re-balloted its stations members in an ongoing dispute over job cuts. Nearly 800 frontline station jobs could go in early 2016, as part of a cuts programme that also includes the closure of every ticket office on the Tube. *Tubeworker*, the

rank-and-file London Underground workers' bulletin published by Workers' Liberty, has argued that the fight against job cuts should not be narrowed down to a "stations" dispute, but should focus on the effect of budget cuts on jobs across grades and departments.

Coordinated strike action by all four Tube unions is almost unprecedented, and would see the network grind to an almost complete standstill. For detailed reports and daily updates, see *Tubeworker's* blog, at workersliberty.org/twblog

Construction workers say: Pay the rate!

Construction workers at a SITA/Sembcorp construction site in Wilton, Redcar have been campaigning against the company using migrant workers to undercut the national agreement for construction workers.

Workers have been holding regular protests at the site, and other sites run by SITA, arguing that SITA should "pay the rate". Unions including Unite, GMB and Ucat say they have been prevented from talking to migrant workers and blocked from organising them into the union by SITA.

A Workers' Liberty activist spoke to workers at

the protest. Tony, a worker active in the cross-union Teesside Construction Activists group linked to national rank and file construction workers organisations, said "We called off our regular Friday demos when they offered negotiations but it was a con, a stalking tactic, we got nothing out of it." Tony's anger was reflected at the activists' mass meeting on 12 June, where activists agreed to send a bus to Merseyside to protest at a different site owned by SITA.

"It's not only about paying the rates," added Billy, another activist, "there's safety issues, we know



there have been accidents and we've got photos of dangerous practices. Then some workers have a three-hour journey each way on top of their shift, which doesn't allow the proper sleeping time. That's out of order — and unsafe."

Activists with the Teesside People's Assembly and Love Teesside Hate Racism have been supporting the protests and organising solidarity with migrant groups.

Other industrial news

More strikes at London Met — bit.ly/1Lr6qBB

38 days of strikes at National Gallery — bit.ly/1K84BrI

Steel unions call off strike — <http://bit.ly/1Gx1MdV>



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Greece: rescue? At what price?

By Dora Polenta

At the meetings of EU prime ministers and finance ministers on 22 June, it looked like grey smoke was coming out at the end of the negotiations.

For the first time, our “partners” (except German finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble) spoke as if the Greek government were nearing a deal. Whether a new deal, or another short-term extension of the existing deal, was not clear.

The latest proposal, submitted by the Greek government in the early hours of Monday morning 22 June, has superseded the previous 47-page “memorandum-lite” document.

Although it looks as if Greece’s position within the eurozone may have been tem-

porarily saved, there was no rejoicing from the Syriza government and the Syriza leadership.

The Syriza leadership narrative about a new Keynesian deal to save Greece and the Euro being achieved through rational negotiations and through playing on the contradictions and splits between our “partners” has been trashed.

Rather than rejoicing, there a feeling of numbness and an implicit recognition that the government’s last “red lines” (let alone the Thessaloniki declaration, on which it was elected), have been grossly violated in favour of the ruling class and international creditors.

The stance of the Syriza Left Platform ministers and MPs is still unclear.

• See centre pages



Syriza's Alexis Tsipras listens rather too much to European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker

Why people are fleeing Eritrea

By Dan Katz

The UN estimates that 5,000 Eritreans are escaping from their homeland each month.

The number leaving has been increasing rapidly since the last months of 2014. There are over 100,000 Eritrean refugees in both Ethiopia and Sudan.

Many migrants are taking the dangerous route to Europe across the Mediterranean. Perhaps 25% of the total is from Eritrea. Why do they risk the people-smugglers and the chance of drowning?

Eritrea is a former Italian colony with a population of six million. This north east African state faces Yemen and Saudi Arabia across the Red Sea. Its major neighbours are Sudan and Ethiopia.

Eritrea finally won a prolonged war for independence from Ethiopia in 1993, when a big majority of Eritreans voted for independence in a referendum.

That left Ethiopia landlocked. A further border war in the late 1990s left thousands dead on both sides. The war ended in 2000.

Eritrea is now a one-party state with one of the most

repressive regimes on the planet. The misnamed People’s Front for Democracy and Justice is the ruling party and its leader, Issayas Afeworki, has been in power since independence.

Afeworki was leader of the EPLF, which fought for and won independence. He has been described by a former US ambassador as a “cruel and unhinged dictator.”

For the past eight years Reporters Without Borders has ranked Eritrea bottom

of its list of states respecting press freedom. The state is more repressive against the press than North Korea and Syria. There has been no independent press in the country since 2001 when non-government-controlled media was shut down and journalists rounded up.

There have been no elections since 1993 and scheduled parliamentary and presidential elections were postponed indefinitely in 2001.

Amnesty International

believes there are 10,000 political prisoners in Eritrea.

A new United Nations Human Rights Council report (June 2015) details the extent of the abuse suffered by Eritreans. “The commission [found] that systematic, widespread and gross human rights violations have been and are being committed in Eritrea under the authority of the Government... Eritreans live in constant fear that their may be monitored by security agents, and that informa-

tion gathered may be used against them leading to arbitrary arrest, detention, torture, disappearance or death...”

“The few attempts to exercise the right to peacefully demonstrate have been crushed by the Government, which arrested, detained and sometimes executed demonstrators extrajudicially.”

Free trade unions are banned and, “the use of forced labour is so prevalent in Eritrea that all sec-

tors of the economy rely on it.”

Young Eritreans are conscripted into the army for an indefinite period, perhaps lasting decades. Inside the army there is a violent brutal regime where sexual violence against women is widespread. There seems to be a shoot-to-kill policy operating at the border to prevent people escaping conscription and repression, and a complex pass system operates inside the country.

VIOLENCE

Religion is tightly controlled and violence has been used extensively against Muslim clerics.

The report concludes, “The enjoyment of rights and freedoms are severely curtailed in an overall context of a total lack of rule of law. The commission also finds that the violations in the areas of extrajudicial executions, torture (including sexual torture), national service and forced labour may constitute crimes against humanity.”

Those who are being driven towards Europe deserve our sympathy and help, not our government’s contempt and indifference to their lives.

“We are not going back”

By Hugh Edwards

Earlier this month hundreds of migrants made their way, against state resistance, to the Italian-French border town of Ventimiglia, aiming to get into France.

The French authorities, like the Swiss, the Austrians and the Hungarians have denied them entry.

But the migrants have had enough of being at the mercy of an increasingly warring collection of chauvinists. They refused to budge from the town, occupying the rocky shore of



the little nearby locality, Ponte San Ludovico.

Their courage and determination brought solidarity action not just from political organisations, trade

unionists and social centres from Ventimiglia, but also from socialist and radical groups across the border in France.

All united to drive off a

gaggle of fascists and vermin from Lega Nord. On 20 June they marched in a militant demonstration behind the banner of “Open the Borders” through Ventimiglia, arm-in-arm with the migrant families and workers. Their courage and dignity shows that solidarity in itself is not enough if a free and united workers Europe is to be had.

A fight for the united political action of Europe’s workers for the overthrow of the capitalist system must be on the agenda of every serious battle ahead.